

The Corpus of the Mosaics of Tunisia: Carthage Project, 1992–1994

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In 1992 the team of the Corpus of the Mosaics of Tunisia (CMT) began research on the mosaics and their structures in the Park of the Antonine Baths in Carthage. The results will be published as volume four of the *Corpus des Mosaïques de Tunisie*. The park (Fig. 1) is bounded on the northwest by the Avenue Bourguiba, on the northeast by the grounds of the Presidential Palace, on the southeast by the Gulf of Tunis, and on the southwest by the Avenue des Thermes. It comprises sixteen insulae, situated between cardines XII and XXI, and decumani

III and V east. Originally a vast Punic cemetery, it became the site of both Roman and Christian constructions, including the Antonine Baths, third- and fourth-century houses, and fifth- and sixth-century Christian monuments.

The park was chosen for excavation as it is the only sector in Carthage in which a sizable number of pavements or fragments thereof remain in situ, permitting the CMT to pursue its aim of studying mosaics in their original architectural and archaeological contexts. Of some two hundred known pavements, about eighty-five are still in place, and twenty or so are in the Bardo and Carthage Museums. The rest have long since disappeared. During the three CMT summer campaigns (1992–1994), almost all the structures with mosaics were cleared, facilitating architectural and archaeological research. The exceptions are the rooms opening on the northeast side of the esplanade of the Antonine Baths, which, since they border the presidential grounds, are off-limits for security reasons. The mosaics were cleaned, recorded, photographed, and consolidated.

The clearing revealed mosaics hidden amid brush or covered with dirt: a fragment of a polychrome mosaic of overlapping scales behind the southwest apse of the church, Dermech III in insula 5 (Fig. 1,A); two plain white mosaics in a small bath in insula 11 (Fig. 1,E) and, in the same insula, isolated fragments (Fig. 1,G) on the terrace above the northeast side of the Maison du Triconch, formerly identified as a schola (Fig. 1,F); and in the Maison des Corbeilles in insula 6 (Fig. 1,C). In this last area we uncovered two hitherto unrecorded

The Corpus of the Mosaics of Tunisia project is sponsored by the Institut National du Patrimoine in Tunis, the American Academy in Rome, Dumbarton Oaks, and the University of Iowa. The team comprises co-directors Margaret A. Alexander[†] and Aïcha Ben Abed-Ben Khader, associate directors Christine Kondoleon and Guy P. R. Métraux, research associate Anna Gonosová, architect Frank C. Miller, assistant architects Julie Chang (1993) and Eric Peterson (1994), ceramic specialist Lucinda L. Neuru, conservators Moez Chelli and Edith P. Dietze, computer operators John V. Hastings (1992) and Robert L. Alexander, and assistants Diana Brulhart (1993), Christie W. Hastings (1992), and Laura Peterson (1994).

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mosaics: one with a familiar diagonal grid pattern decorated with florets, the other an unusual combination of tessellatum, sectile, and imitation sectile (Fig. 2). Sondages, but not a full-scale excavation, were undertaken to obtain evidence for dating the mosaics and determining building phases. They were done by G. P. R. Métraux in the Maison des Mosaïques Noires et Blanches in insula 6 (Fig. 1,B), the Maison de Dionysos in insula 9 (Fig. 1,D), and the Christian complex known as Dermech I in insula 13 (Fig. 1,I); A. Ben Abed-Ben Khader carried out those in the Maison du Triconch in insula 11 (Fig. 1,F) and the Christian church known as Dermech II in insula 13 (Fig. 1,H). A few additional soundings were planned for 1995 in the Maison des Corbeilles and the rooms along the northwest side of the esplanade of the Antonine Baths.

MAISON DES MOSAÏQUES NOIRES ET BLANCHES (FIG. 1, B AND FIG. 3)

Located on the southwest side of insula 6, with an entrance from decumanus IV, the house is destroyed except for a few low walls, two mosaic-paved rooms, and traces of a private bath. A sounding in one of the rooms yielded sherds dating from the second to the early fourth century.

MAISON DE DIONYSOS (FIG. 1, D AND FIGS. 4–6)

Named after the now badly mutilated mosaic (Fig. 6,a) of the god with a satyr (Fig. 5), the house occupies the north corner of insula 9 at the intersection of cardo XV and decumanus IV. The ruins were sufficiently cleared to develop a plan (Fig. 6),¹ albeit incomplete, but did not explain how the Dionysus mosaic related to two higher-level pavements: a grid composition enclosing laurel wreaths (Fig. 6,b) and a black-and-white geometric mosaic with a threshold panel displaying a phallus and inscription (Fig. 6,c). One sondage and two clearing sondages revealed two building phases.

A sondage in the area of the Dionysus mosaic showed that the pavement continued south-

westward and was bounded to the northwest by a curving wall defining an exedra (2.85 m in diameter). A small area of mosaic foundations further to the southeast may indicate a room associated with the exedra. Clearing confirmed that these elements formed part of a first phase of construction, tentatively dated to the third century on the basis of the pottery; the glass is being studied. The structure was subsequently dismantled and the house rebuilt and redecorated.

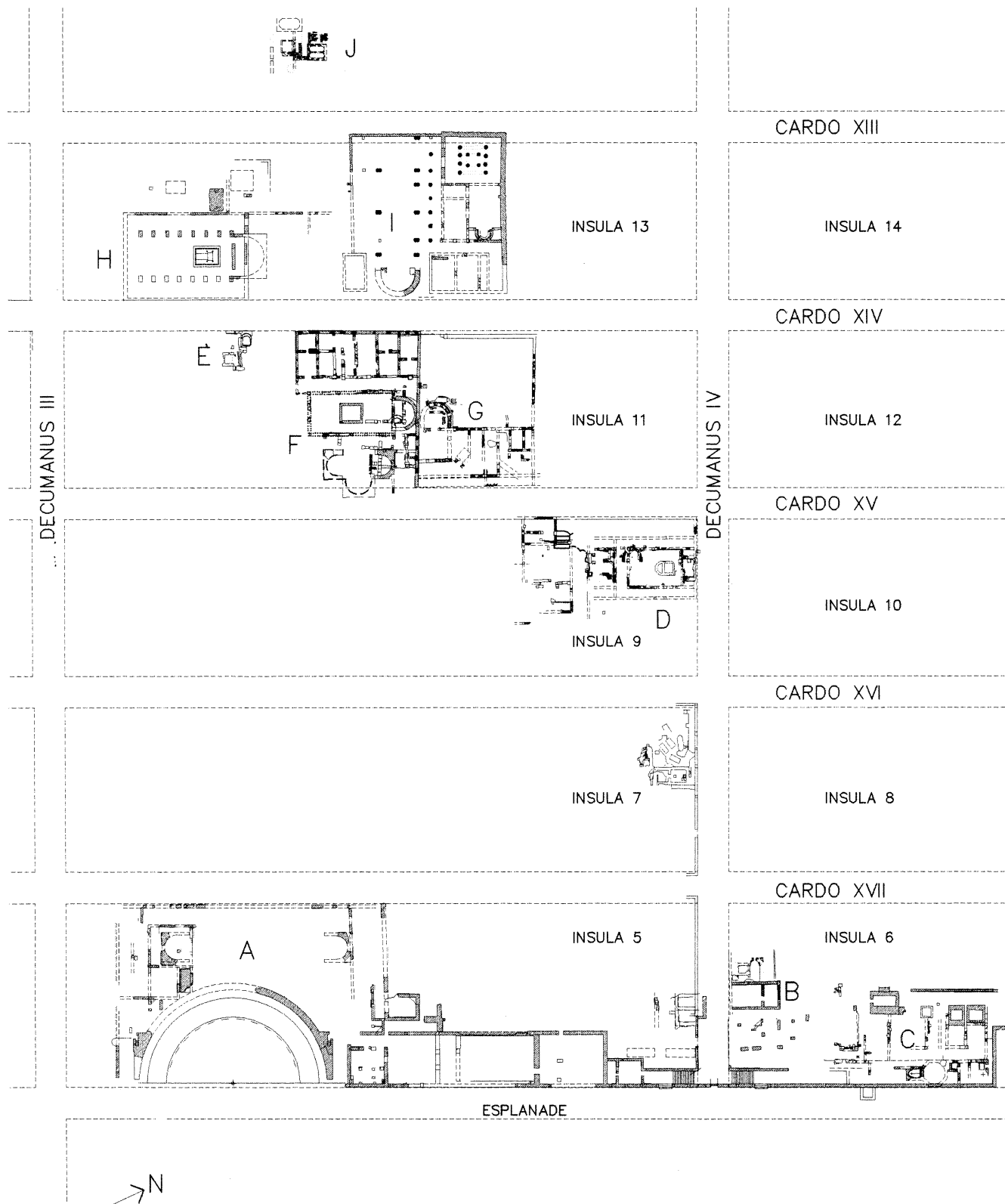
More extensive clearing revealed that the higher-level laurel wreath mosaic (Fig. 6,b) paved two of the porticos of a peristyle, which must have occupied much of the area during the building's second phase. The porticos (2.30 m wide), defined by column or pier bases (originally five on the northwest and southeast sides, and four to the northeast and southwest), were later separated from the *viridarium* (8 × 11.10 m) by low walls. An apsidal basin is placed on the northeast/southwest axis at the northeast end of the *viridarium*. Clearing along the wall southwest of the Dionysus mosaic showed that the black-and-white geometric mosaic (Fig. 6,c) was also related to the second phase, though separated from the rest of the house by a drain. Pottery finds give a provisional fourth/early-fifth-century date for this phase of the house. White limestone flagstones were later laid in parts of the peristyle, altering the character of the house.

THE MAISON DU TRICONCH (FIG. 1, F AND FIGS. 7–12)

Situated in about the middle of insula 11 (Fig. 1), at a level well below Dermech I, the Maison du Triconch is one of the park's most unusual buildings. It was identified by G. Ch.-Picard as an imperial schola partly on the basis of the famous mosaic depicting putti dancing around a tholos (Fig. 8) in the middle apse of the triconch.² This is a tempting identification, but it rests on rather fragile arguments. We approached the study of the monument with many questions. The structure (Fig. 7) is bordered to the northwest by a terrace wall along cardo XIV (Fig. 1), to the southeast by cardo XV, to the southwest by a modern road, and to the

¹The *Corpus* plans reproduced here are tentative and do not include all available data. Mosaics referred to in the text are indicated in Figure 1 by hatching.

²G. Ch.-Picard, "Une schola de collège à Carthage," *Karthago* 3 (1951), 168–91.



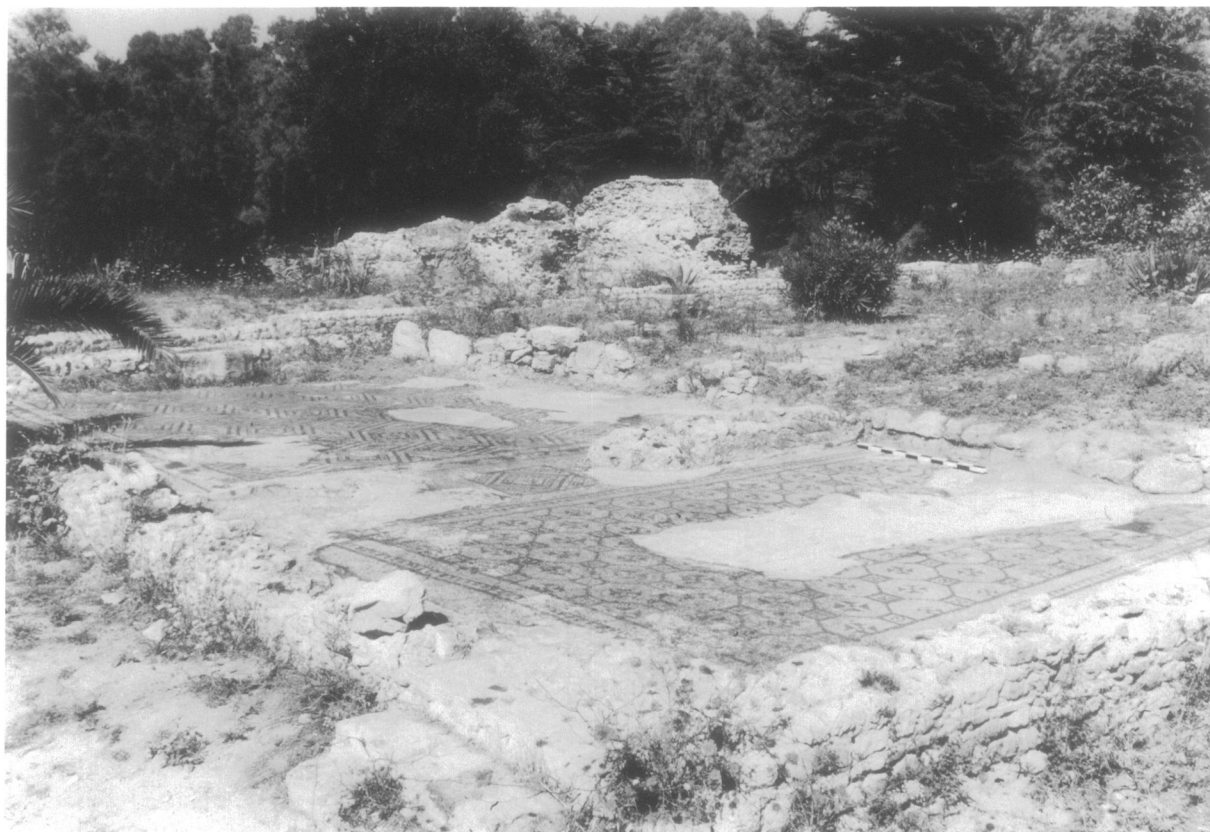
1 Park of the Antonine Baths, plan of the work area (drawing: Frank C. Miller)

- A Dermech III
- B Maison des Mosaïques Noires et Blanches
- C Maison des Corbeilles
- D Maison de Dionysos
- E Small Baths

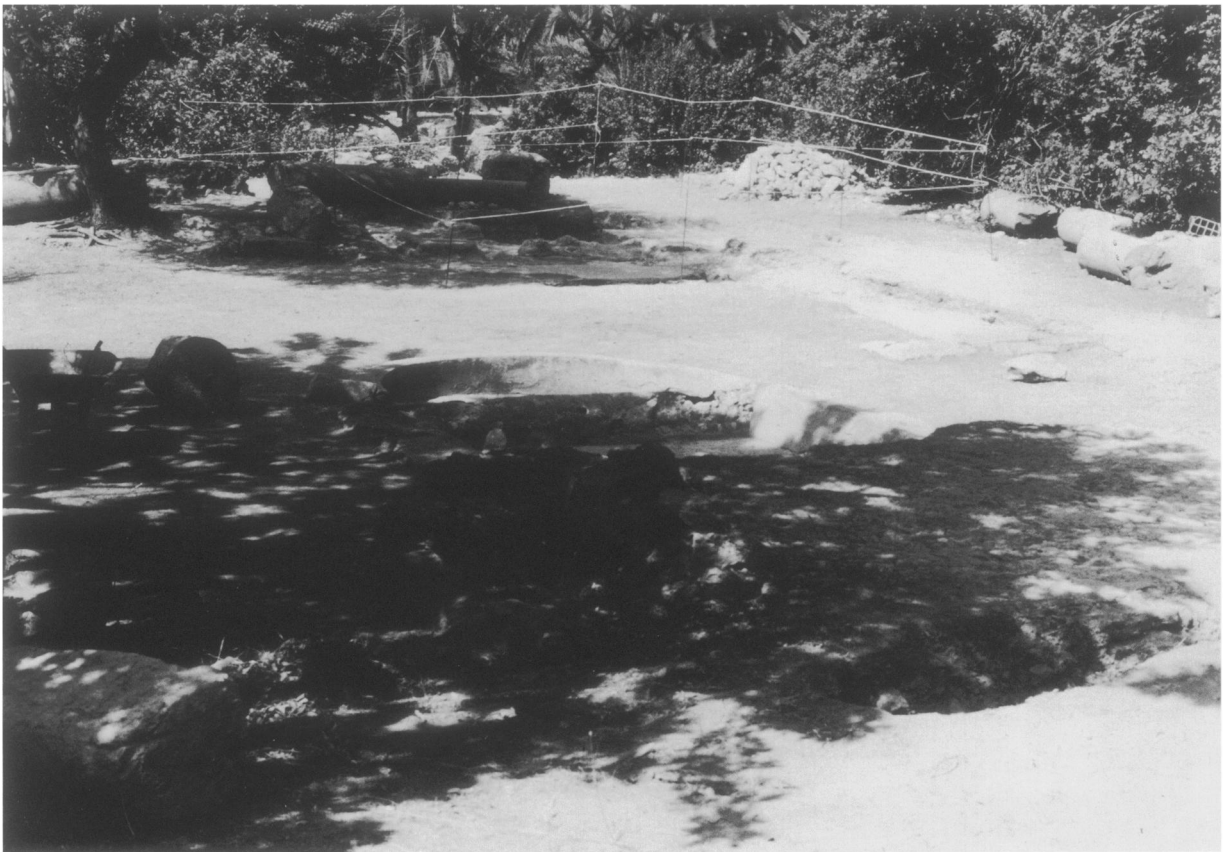
- F Maison du Triconch
- G Exedra of Four Horses
- H Dermech II
- I Dermech I
- J Maison de la Cachette



2 Maison des Corbeilles, mosaic (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



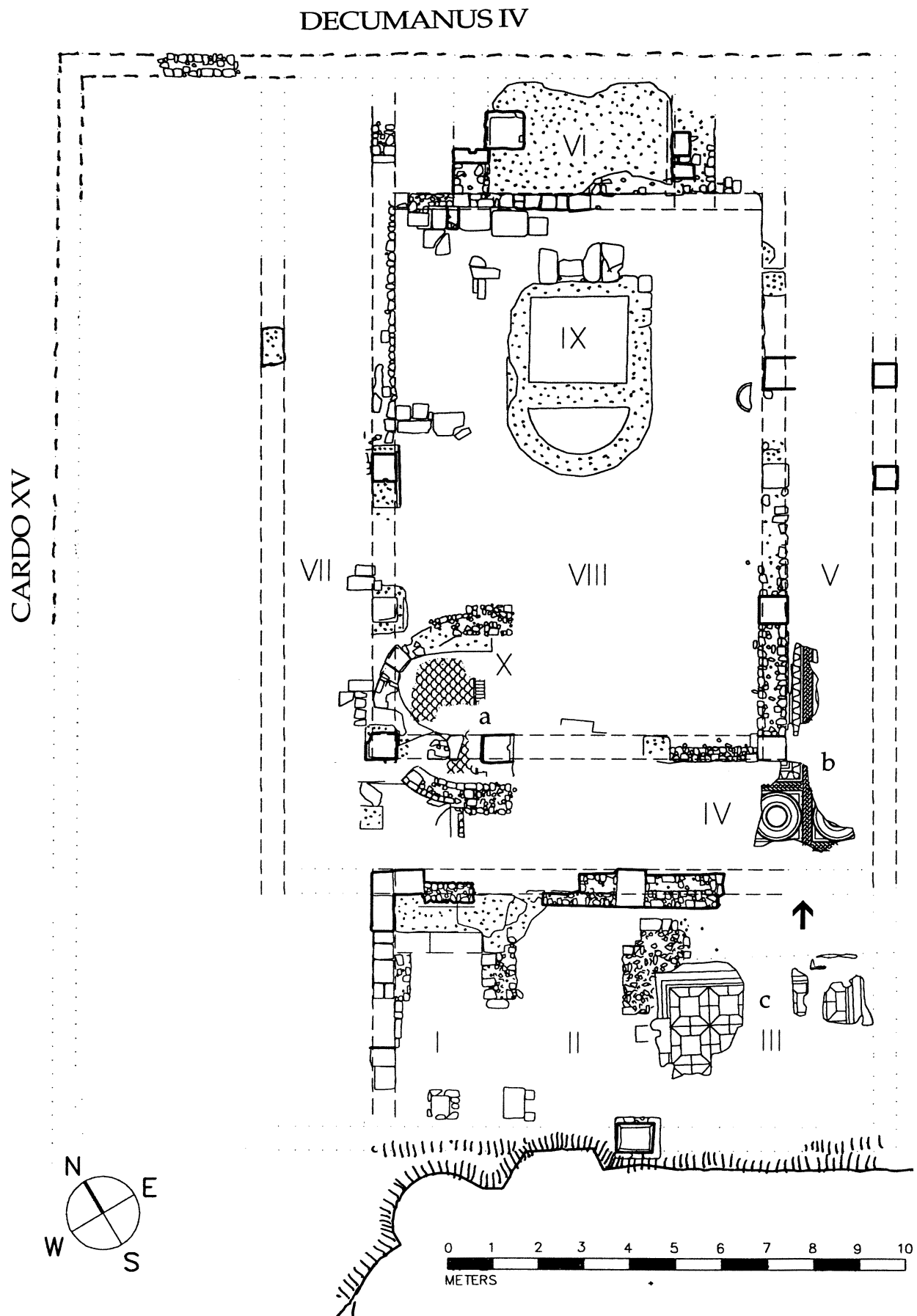
3 Maison des Mosaïques Noires et Blanches, view from the east (photo: Anna Gonosová)



4 Maison de Dionysos, view from the east (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



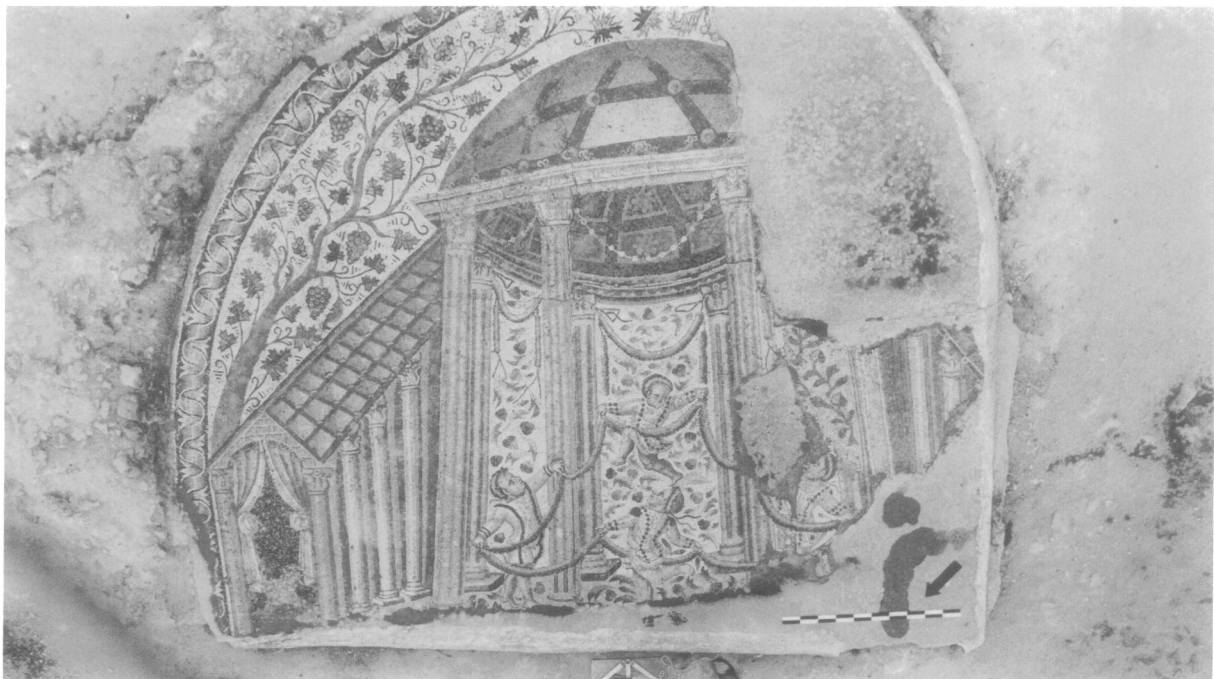
5 Maison de Dionysos, exedra mosaic (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



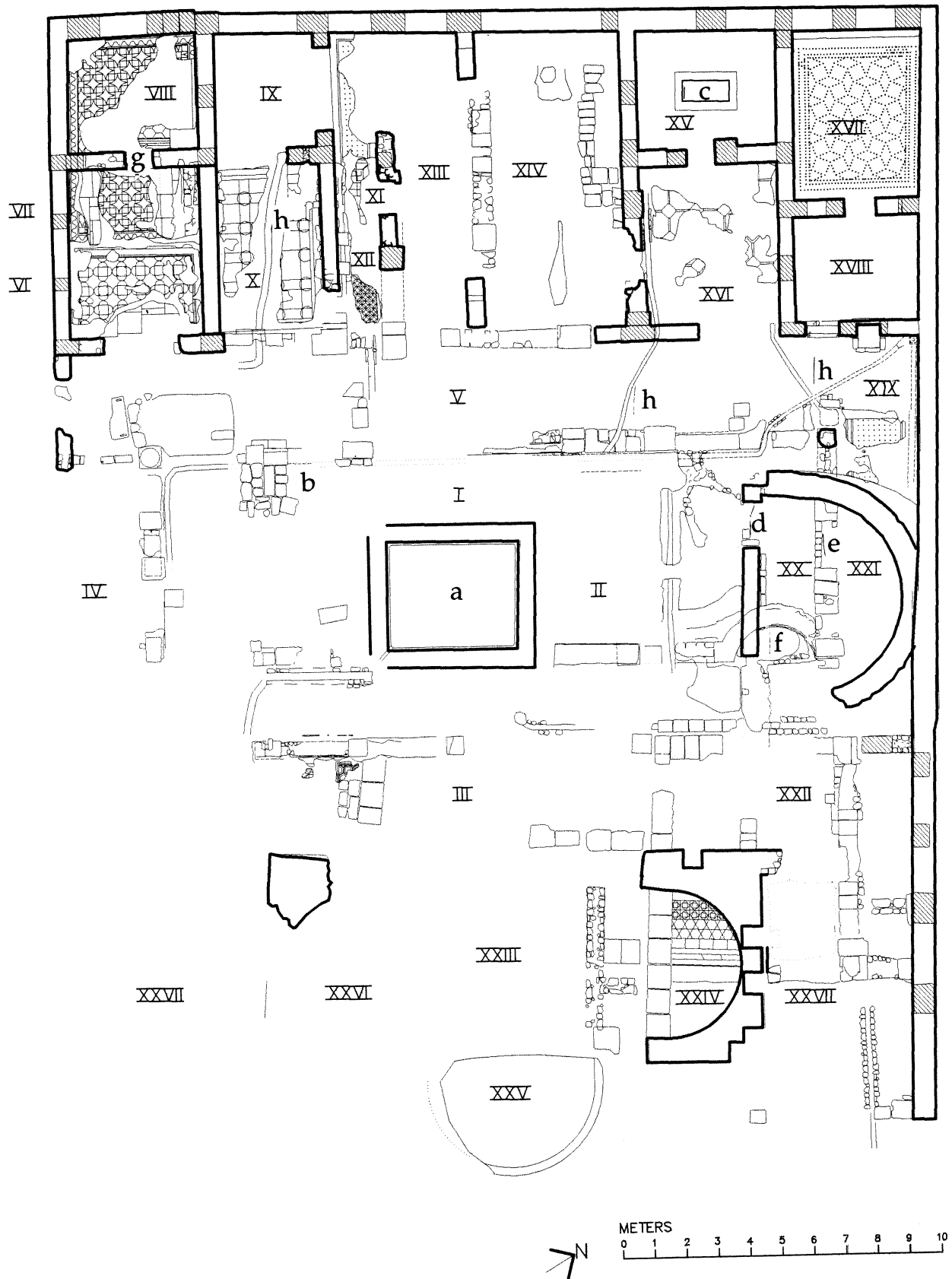
6 Maison de Dionysos, plan of present conditions (drawing: Frank C. Miller)



7 Maison du Triconch, view from the southeast (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



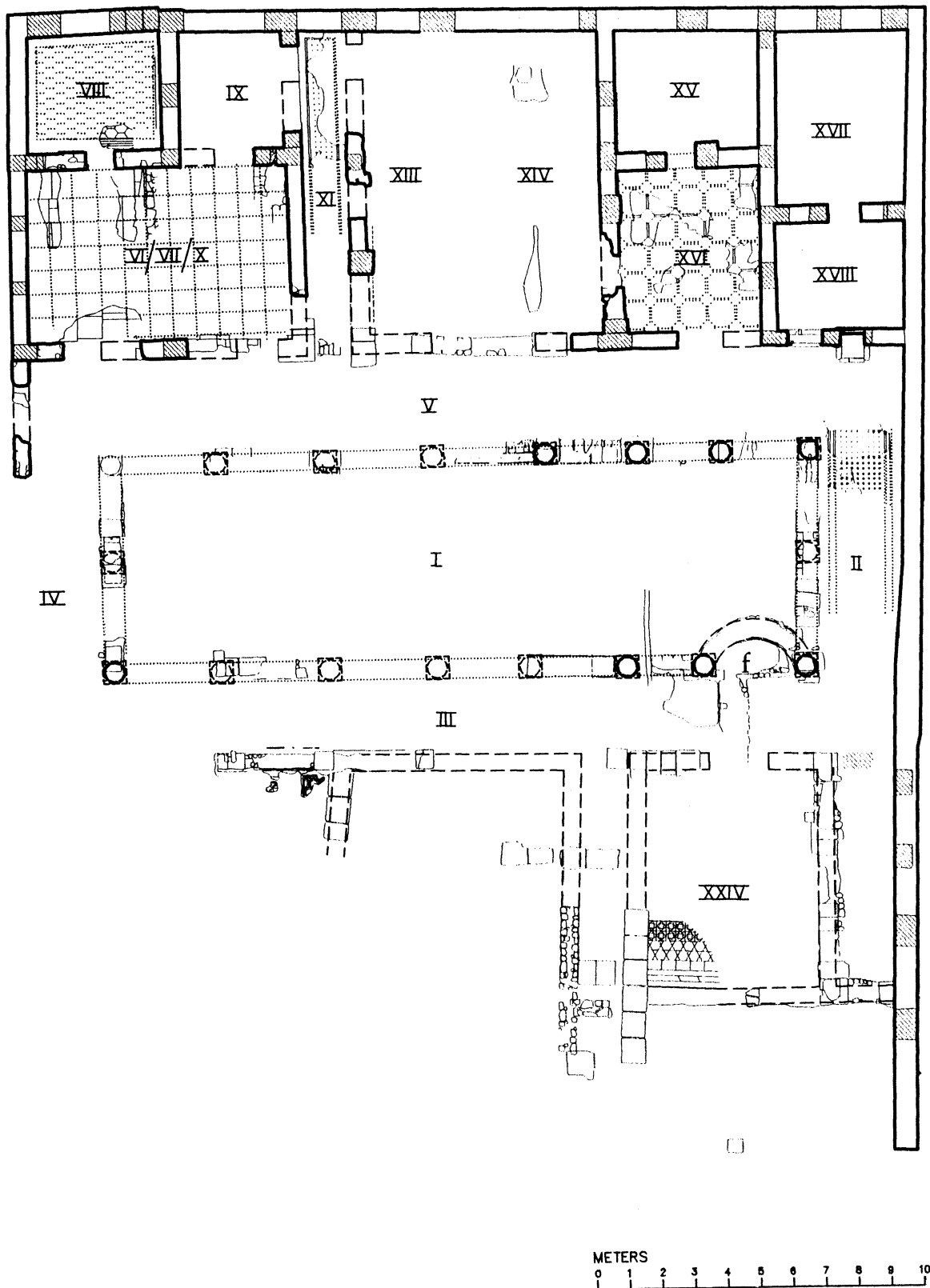
8 Maison du Triconch, southeast apse mosaic (photo: Marie Patricia Raynaud)



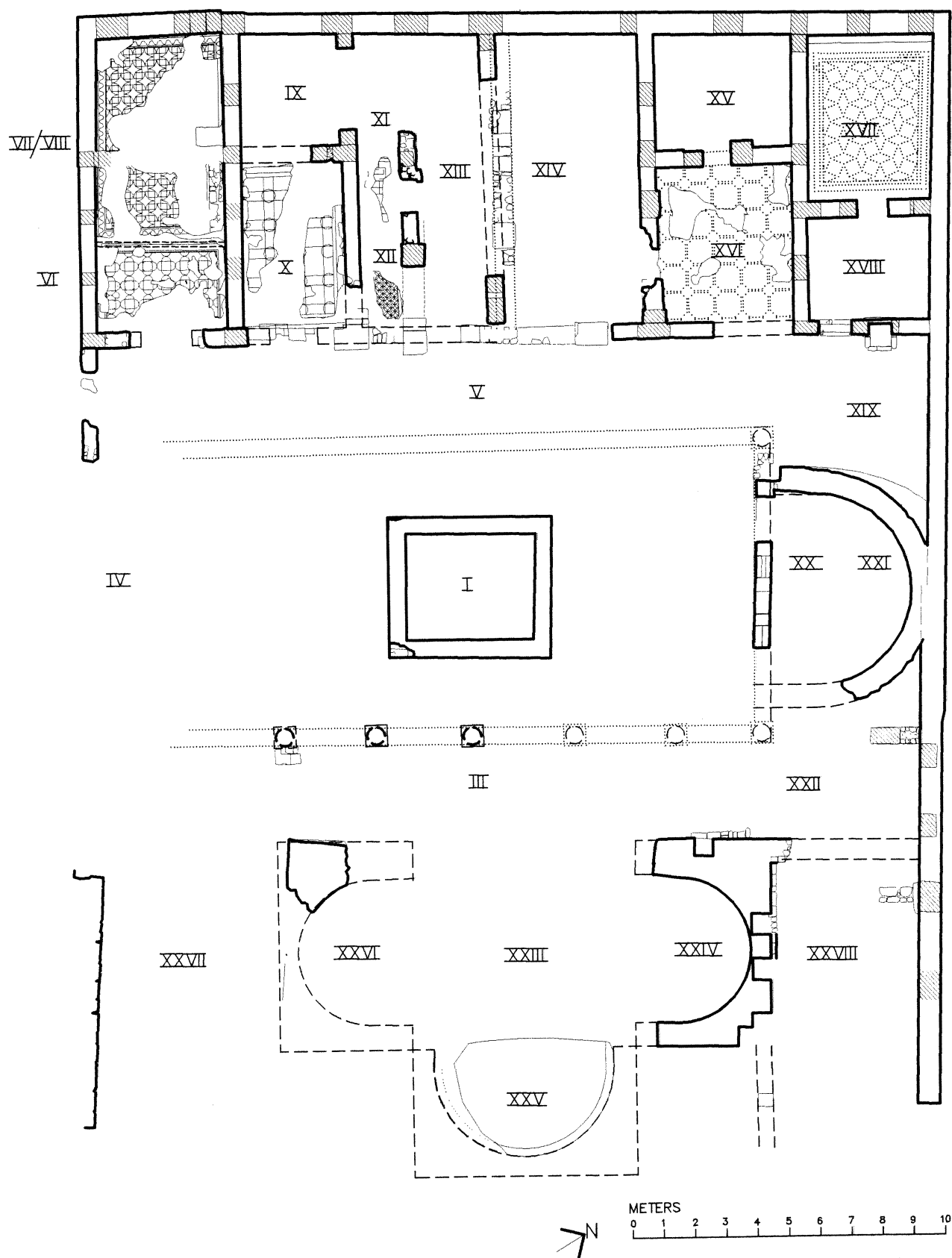
9 Maison du Triconch, plan of present conditions (drawing: Frank C. Miller)



10 Maison du Triconch, northeast apse showing spaces XX and XXI and basin in the eastern corner of the peristyle (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



11 Maison du Triconch, plan of Phase 1 (drawing: Frank C. Miller)



12 Maison du Triconch, plan of Phase 2 (drawing: Frank C. Miller)



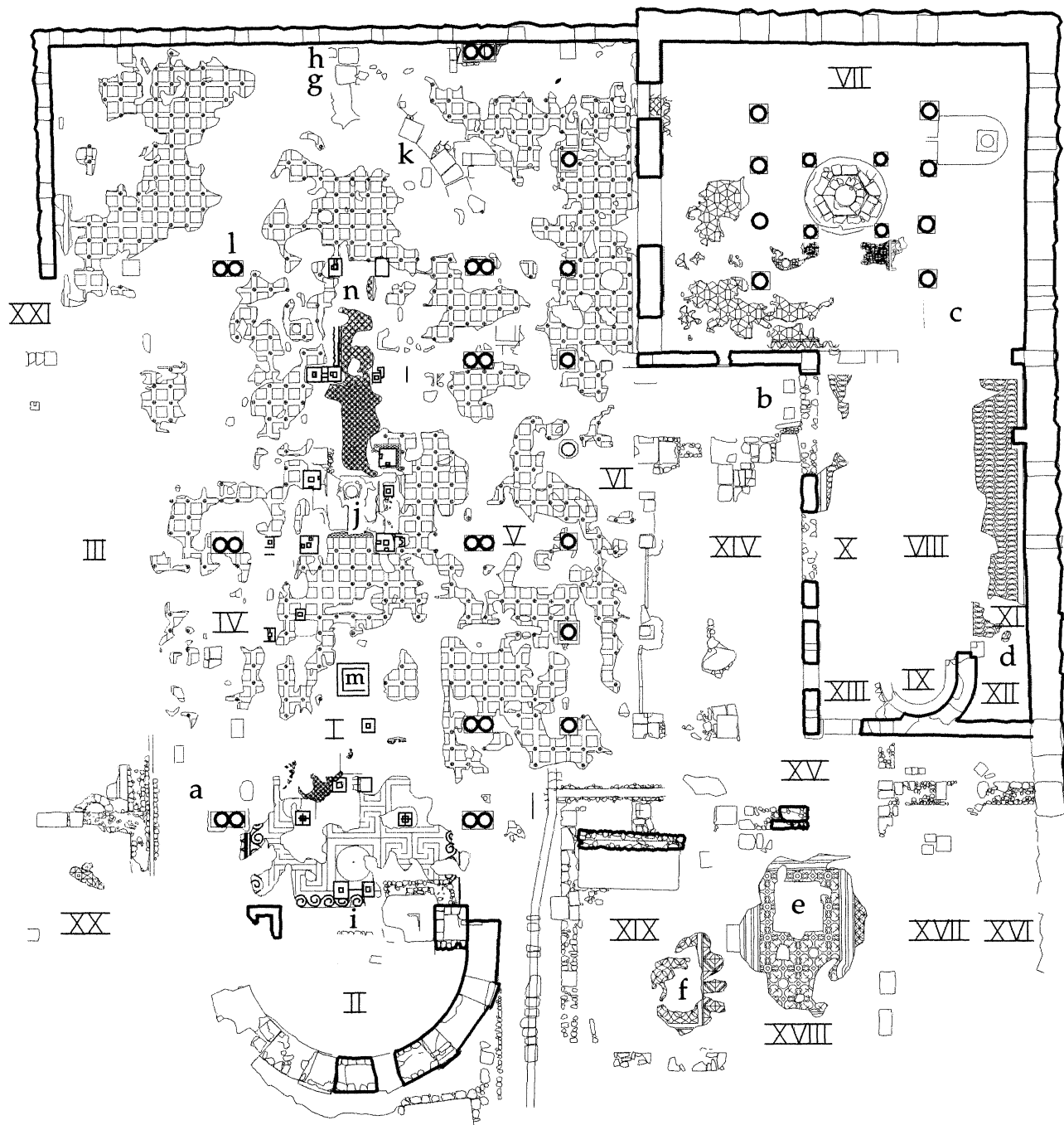
13 Dermech II, view from the north (photo: Anna Gonosová)



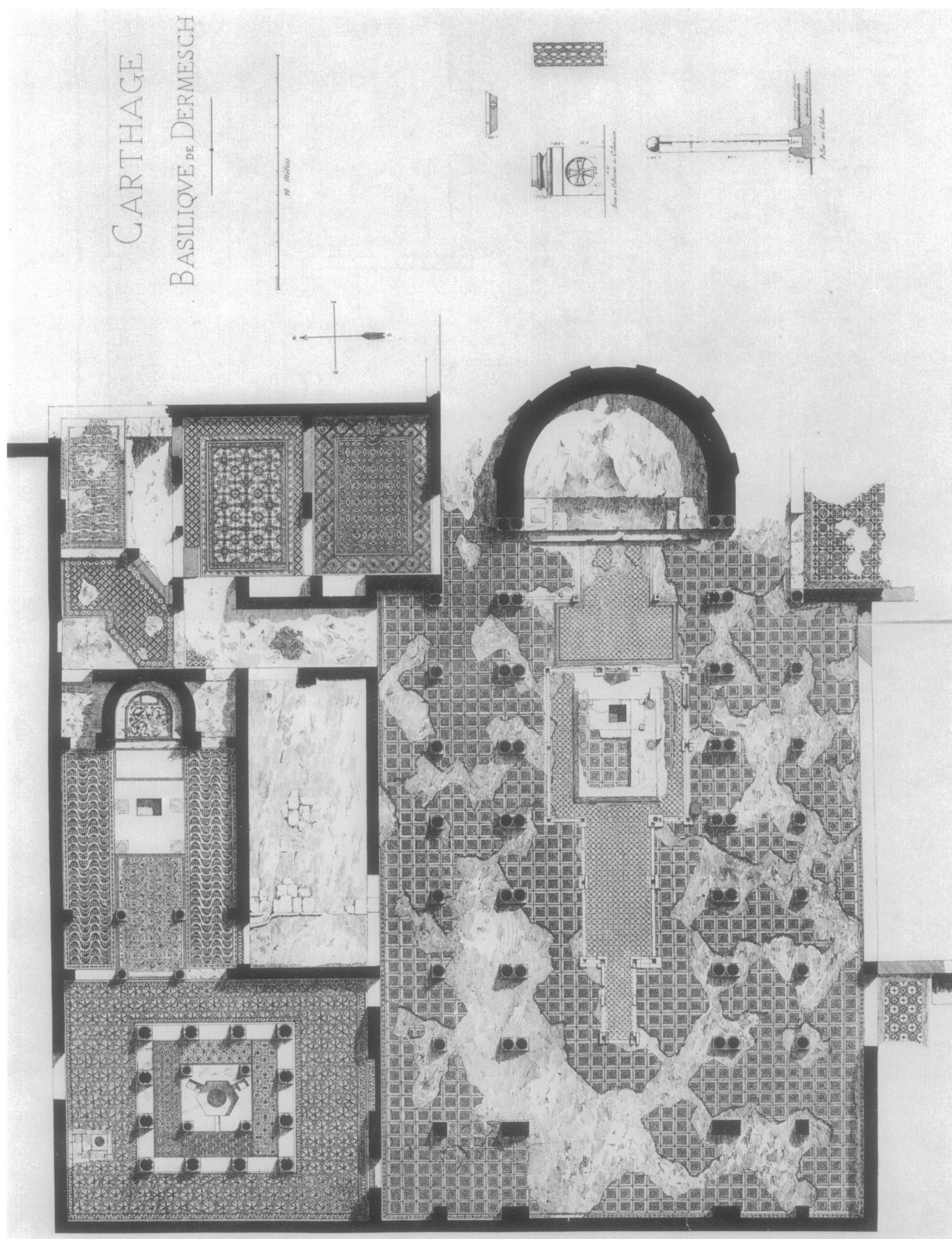
15 Dermech II, altar platform
(photo: Marie Patricia Raynaud)



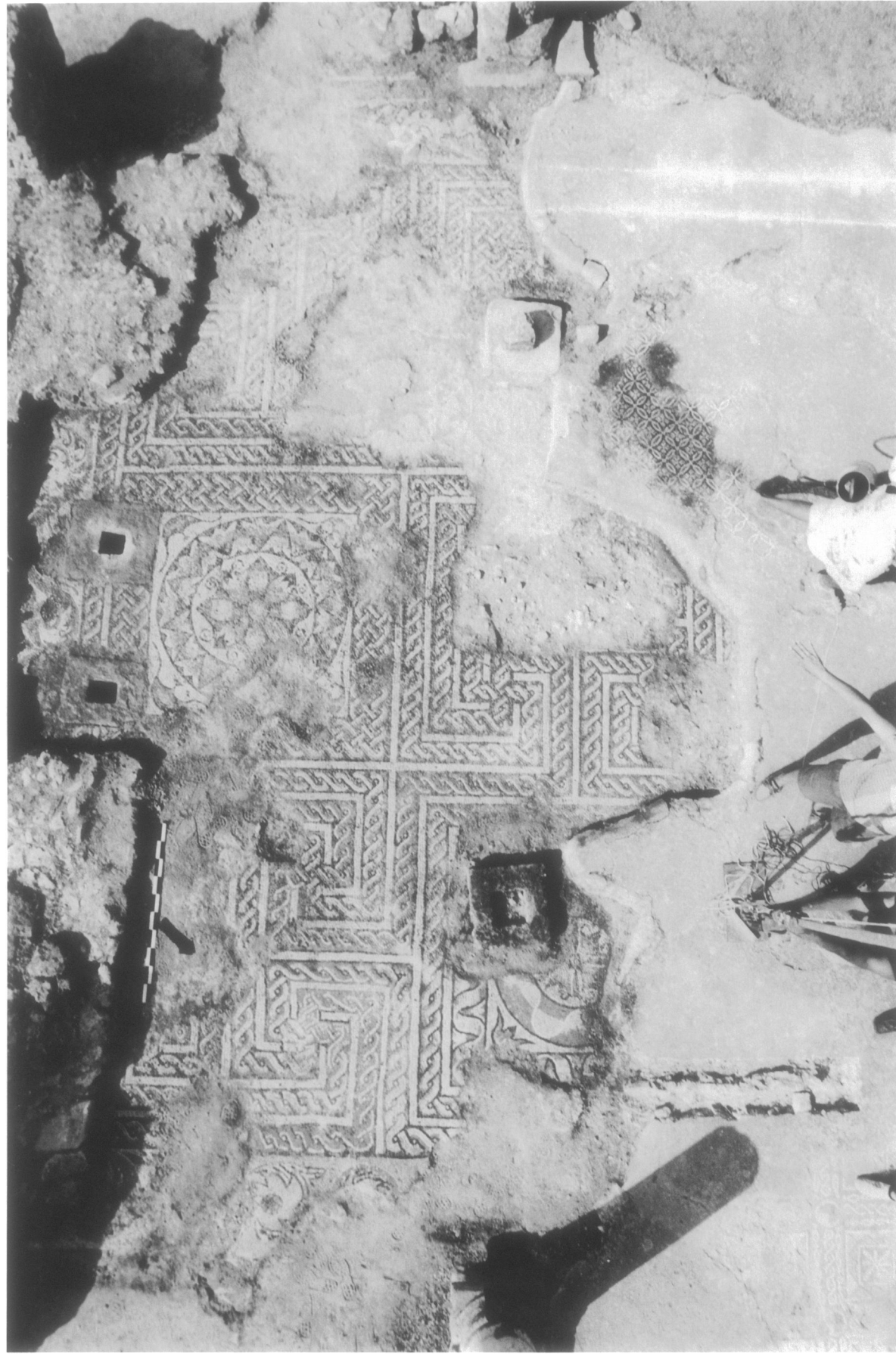
16 Dermech I, view of basilica from the northwest (photo: Robert L. Alexander)



17 Dermech I, plan of present conditions (drawing: Frank C. Miller)



18 Dermesch I, plan by Sadoux (after Gauckler, *Basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie*)



19 Dermech I, basilica, early mosaic (photo: Marie Patricia Raynaud)



20 Dermech I, basilica, nave showing early altar area and reliquary receptacle, coffer, and solea mosaics
(photo: Marie Patricia Raynaud)



21 Dermech I, foundations of northwest apse (photo: Robert L. Alexander)

northeast by a wall serving also as a support for monuments at a higher level.

The building is delimited to the northwest by an *opus africanum* wall of relatively well-cut large and small limestone blocks, the former mostly robbed. The regular rhythm of its construction contrasts with that of the northeast wall, which is built of juxtaposed sections of disparate materials. To the southeast, no wall is visible beyond the apse with the putti, whose extrados impinges on cardo xv. The only well-preserved part of the southwest wall, near the western corner, is relatively well made; it resembles the mode of construction of the northwest wall. A trench dug further along the line of the southwest wall revealed no trace of a wall. A section in the southern corner made of reused material testifies to very late construction. The entrance to the building has not been found.

The structure (see Fig. 9) is dominated by a large court (i) with a central basin (a) made of rubble whose interior walls and floor are covered by mosaic, now almost entirely hidden by a lime deposit as well as lime and sand mortar. In the area around the basin are patches of paving stones (b), often of reused material, more or less well aligned.

The northwest wing, separated from the court by a corridor (v), is composed of a series of spaces (vi–xviii) of varying dimensions and shapes, most of which open onto corridor v. Near the western corner is a small room (vi) paved with a mosaic of quadrilobes of peltae around a square; 20 cm beneath it are remains of a sectile floor. Room vii, originally separated from room vi by a thin wall, is paved with a mosaic of small squares filled with cubes in perspective and concave-sided squares decorated with floral motifs. This mosaic continues into room viii under the wall now separating the two spaces. There was apparently no communication with adjoining rooms ix and x. The division between the latter two rooms is defined primarily by the limits of the polychrome geometric mosaic in room x. The pavement is cut by a deep trench for the installation of a late drain. Room ix was paved with mosaic, of which a fragment and traces of the foundations are still visible. Flanking these rooms is a long and very narrow corridor (xi/xii) that opens onto corridor v. Three mosaics

are visible in the corridor: a black mosaic with a semis of white marble squares at the northwest end; at a higher level, a black-and-white geometric pavement; and a polychrome mosaic of interlacing circles. The latter two must originally have been separated by a thin wall. A crudely constructed drain runs along the southwest side of both pavements. To the northeast are two oblong rooms (xiii and xiv), both originally paved with sectile; only traces of the foundations remain. The adjoining room (xvi) preserves the imprint of its sectile: a scheme of tangent octagons determining squares. Beyond this room is a second chamber (xv) whose pavement was destroyed by the implantation of a tomb (c). The north corner of the building is occupied by two connecting rooms (xvii and xviii), both originally paved with mosaic; a fragment in room xvii shows a composition of lozenges and squares.

The northeast wing of the court is dominated by a large apse (xx, ii/xxi) constructed of rubble, whose entrance is partially blocked by a low wall built of blocks of reused material (Fig. 9,d and Fig. 10). Beyond this wall, separating spaces xx and ii/xxi, is a row of large limestone blocks (Fig. 9,e and Fig. 10) that at some time marked the southwest limit of a black mosaic with a semis of white marble squares. This mosaic continues under the northwest apse wall into space xix.

The southeast side of the court (Fig. 9) is occupied essentially by a grand trichora (xxiii–xxvi) placed on an axis perpendicular to that of the preceding apse. It constitutes the “noble” room of the structure. Only apse xxiv conserves its walls. Apse xxv is defined by its mosaic of putti (Fig. 8). The third apse (xxvi) is recognizable only from a portion of wall and fragments of its mosaic of interlacing circles. The central space (xxiii) retains a few polychrome marble tesserae.

During the 1993–94 seasons, our aim was to provide an intelligible reading of the plan as a whole. Since there was no clear indication of a framework for the center of the building (Fig. 9), priority was given to examining the court and its corridors (i–v). We uncovered several plinths of a colonnade running around all four sides of the court, permitting us to reconstruct a rectangular peristyle with a northeast/southwest axis (Fig. 11). Between the column in the

east corner and the first column on the southeast side were found the remains of a basin (Fig. 9,f and Fig. 11,f), completely leveled out retaining traces of hydraulic mortar and even bits of marble revetment on the interior walls. Thus, originally there was a well-conceived peristyle (I-V) around which other spaces could be organized.

The second major investigation, centered on the northwest wing, proved that this area also had undergone numerous changes. Clearing revealed that the *opus sectile* below the mosaic in room VI (Fig. 9) continued into rooms VII and X, forming a single large room VI/VII/X (Fig. 11). A mosaic-decorated sill in the northwest wall of room VI/VII led into a small chamber, corresponding to space VIII, paved with a black-and-white mosaic of adjacent hexagons (Figs. 9 and 11). In corridor XI/XII, below the two geometric mosaics described above, was a long black mosaic with white squares similar to that in spaces XIX and II/XXI (Figs. 9 and 11). Cleaning in the latter spaces showed that they probably formed the northeast portico (II) of the peristyle (Fig. 11). Work in the southeast section, under apse XXIV of the triconch, revealed part of the foundations of a sectile-paved room (Figs. 9 and 11) opposite the basin (f) in the east corner of the peristyle.

It would be premature to speak now of definitive phases, but it seems certain that the building in question underwent at least three phases of profound structural alteration. Phase 1 (Fig. 11) is marked by a long rectangular peristyle (I-V) with basin (f) in the east corner and a profusion of rooms paved with sectile: VI/VII/X, XIII, XIV, and XXIV, while portico II, rooms VIII and probably IX, as well as corridor XI were paved with simple mosaics. Phase 2 (Fig. 12) is defined essentially by the construction of the northeast apse (XX/XXI), the triconch (XXIII-XXVI), and changes in the length and breadth of the central court. It was probably during this phase that the large mosaic-lined basin (Fig. 9,a) was placed in the center of the peristyle. The addition of the apses, creating so to speak a new structure, dictated the laying of new pavements in those spaces and probably the changes made in certain rooms in the northwest wing. Rooms VI, VII/VIII, and X were individualized and paved with the polychrome geometric mosaics visible

today (Figs. 9 and 12). The black-and-white mosaic in room XVII was probably laid at this time. Rooms XIII, XIV, and XVI apparently retained their sectile pavements. Phase 3 (Fig. 9) can be perceived in the placing of flagstones (b) around the central basin, in effect destroying the structure of the peristyle. It was undoubtedly during this period that a wall (g) was built dividing room VII/VIII into two separate spaces and perhaps also the wall in front of the northeast apse (d). The other great change was in the installation of a multitude of channels (h) to collect the maximum amount of rainwater and drain it toward the cisterns that lie beneath the northern corner of corridor V and the southern corner of the peristyle (Fig. 9).

The sondages effected in rooms VI-VIII (Fig. 9), to determine a *terminus ante quem* for the first phase and a *terminus post quem* for the second, produced coins (not yet studied) and potsherds. One of the latter, found in the nucleus of the mosaic in room VII, dates to the fourth century; another, from the same sondage, dates to the fourth/early fifth century. A third fragment, from the rudus of the top mosaic in room VIII, is broadly dated to the fourth-sixth centuries. A sondage in apse XXIV, between the southwest wall bordering the sectile foundations of the room below and the northeast wall of the apse, in what must have been fill for the apse mosaic, revealed two sherds datable to the beginning of the fifth century.

While awaiting the verdict on the coins, these archaeological elements permit us to propose a *terminus ante quem* of the beginning of the fifth century for the first phase of the building. They certainly provide a *terminus post quem* for the apses, the top-level mosaics in the northwest wing, and specifically the figural mosaic in apse XXV (Fig. 8), heretofore dated to the fourth century. We tentatively propose a date in the middle of the fifth century for the second phase.

Since work and reflection on the Maison du Triconch continue, it would be premature to assign a rigid chronological system for the different phases. It would be equally hazardous to try to identify the building too precisely, but its identification as an imperial schola must be discarded. The existence of a peristyle, a wing comprising "private apartments," and monu-

mental apses seem more consistent with a building intended as the *domus* of a well-to-do private citizen.

DERMECH II (FIG. 1, H AND FIGS. 13–15)

Excavated and summarily published by Picard in 1951 and reconsidered by N. Duval in 1972,³ this basilica occupies the southern corner of insula 13 (Fig. 1, H). It is delimited to the southeast by cardo XIV and to the southwest by the present Avenue des Thermes. To the northwest it is contiguous with a cistern and Punic kilns. To the northeast it lies a short distance from and on a lower level than Dermekh I.

The church is oriented northeast/southwest (Figs. 13 and 14). There is no visible trace of the apse. Picard and Duval concluded that it was to the southwest, completely destroyed in the course of construction of the modern street. The basilica is divided into a nave and two aisles by a double colonnade. A rectangular platform (Fig. 14, a and Fig. 15), slightly raised and approached by two steps, is centered on the axis of the church, closer to the northeast than to the southwest end. The basilica is delimited to the northwest by a relatively thin wall (0.55 m thick) carefully constructed of well-cut blocks. The walls on the other three sides are destroyed; a foundation trench was partially revealed along the southeast side. At the northeast end, across the axis of the building, is a row of five great limestone blocks (Fig. 14, b), which seem to have served more as foundations than wall. An entrance (Fig. 14, c), marked by a limestone sill (about 1 m wide), is found at the northeast end of the northwest aisle.

Today only the northwest aisle, less than half the nave, and the northeast end of the southeast aisle are preserved. Of the northwest colonnade two grey limestone plinths and six foundation blocks have been located; the plinths still bear the marks of the columns erected on them. To the northeast of the first plinth is a pillar made of small stones resting

on foundations that abut the plinth (Fig. 14, d). These foundations strongly resemble those for the five blocks mentioned above. Near the northeast end of the nave are the remains of what scholars thought was a late wall (Fig. 14, e). Close attention reveals that it may have been a staircase; visible are what appear to be a step, whose surface is relatively well cemented, and the riser of a second step.

The only surviving mosaics are in the northwest aisle (Fig. 14). The pavement is composed of polychrome interlacing bands determining squares, decorated with birds, and jeweled crosses. Three of the intercolumniation panels are partially preserved, each decorated with a different composition: quadrilobes of peltae around squares filled with a Solomon's knot; circles and concave-sided squares determining curvilinear oblongs; a grid ornamented with small squares. In the southeast aisle, only a tiny fragment of mosaic survives. The southwest part of the nave is said to have been decorated with mosaics identical to those in the northwest aisle.

The surviving part of the nave retains the foundations and imprint of its sectile paving around and on the altar platform (Fig. 14, a and Fig. 15). The placement of the altar (Fig. 14, f) is marked by a line of marble on the northwest side and the stump of one of the four hexagonal colonnettes (Fig. 15) that supported the ciborium. Along the sides of the platform extend long panels with the imprint of *opus sectile* forming a diagonal grid superimposed on a scheme of rectangles and squares. They flanked a panel decorated with oblique bands crossing in the center.

Clearing and sondages have permitted us not only to restore the plan of our predecessors, but also to add to it. Digging to the southwest revealed the limit of the northwest aisle mosaic but no sign of the exterior wall or apse. Strategic digging along the northwest colonnade at the southwest end revealed two additional foundation blocks, thus confirming a series of eight double columns. In the southeast aisle we located the foundation block for the first plinth of the colonnade, and were thus able to determine that the nave was twice as wide as the aisles. Digging beyond the block brought to light, at a depth of 1.5 m, the foundations for a relatively heavy structure that we

³G. Ch.-Picard, "Séance du 15 mars 1943," *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et archéologiques* (1943), 77–84, and "Séance du 15 février 1945," *ibid.* (1945), 257–59; N. Duval, *Les églises à deux absides*, I (Paris, 1973), 75–80.

thought might possibly be the start of the hemicycle of an apse (Fig. 14,g). Continued digging exposed 3 m deep foundations composed of superimposed blocks of limestone, cast gypsum, and marble. The technique of construction is similar to that used in the foundations for the pillar (Fig. 14,c) near the first plinth of the northwest colonnade. A 3 m deep trench was dug further to the northeast but revealed no trace of either wall or foundations; in fact it turned up plastic bottles and sardine cans, indicative of recent intervention. Meager as these findings are, the foundations extending beyond the first plinths of the colonnades seem to us to justify locating the apse on the northeast side.

Picard's earlier excavation about a meter below the southwest part of the nave had revealed evidence of an earlier structure or structures. Their existence is attested by two mosaics. One is a fragment of a polychrome zigzag pattern (Fig. 14,h); the other, much larger and cut by a later wall, is composed of large colorful tesserae set at random (Fig. 14,i).

A sounding in the northwest aisle, through mosaic foundations at the southwest end, produced a large quantity of ceramic, including about ten sherds dating broadly to the fourth-sixth centuries, two lamp fragments dating after 430, and a fragment of the rim of a plate datable to the middle of the fifth century. Given this situation, it seems to us plausible to propose the second half of the fifth century as the earliest date for the basilica in its present state.

DERMECH I (FIG. 1,I AND FIGS. 16–21)

This large ecclesiastical complex (Fig. 1,I) was discovered in 1899–1900 by P. Gauckler while excavating for Punic tombs. It was published in 1913, with a plan by E. Sadoux.⁴ A later study by N. Duval concerns primarily the liturgical arrangements.⁵ The complex stands near the middle of insula 13, a few meters northeast of Dermech II. In Roman times this sector was probably the site of houses like those

known to have existed to the northwest and northeast, e.g., the well-known Maison de la Cachette. The only indication of such occupation is a fragment of a plain white mosaic pavement with black fillets (Fig. 17,a) uncovered recently about 30 cm below the southern corner of the inner southwest aisle of the basilica.

Dermech I is defined on the northwest by a high terrace, more or less on the line of cardo XIII, and on the southeast by cardo XIV (Fig. 1). The surviving walls are of *opus africanum* incorporating some architectural elements (columns, bases, etc.), particularly in the northeast wall. The southwest wall is destroyed, except at its southern and western extremities. The complex (Fig. 17) comprises a five-aisled basilica with a double colonnade between nave (I) and inner aisles (IV, V) and an apse (II) to the southeast, a baptistery (VII), an apsed side chapel (VIII–XIII), an open court (XIV), corridors, and side rooms (XV–XXI). Its appearance following excavation can be judged from Sadoux's plan (Fig. 18). Despite certain discrepancies, the detailed drawing of the mosaics is invaluable as today all the mosaics are damaged and several have been destroyed. The basilica (Fig. 16) was paved with an overall mosaic in imitation of coffering. At some later date a solea was created down the center of the nave; its mosaic paving of interlacing circles was laid over the coffer mosaic. The other structures were paved with colorful geometric mosaics; the only figural elements, largely birds, decorated the southwest inner portico of the baptistery, the nave and apse of the chapel, and room XVIII.

Observations and excavations in 1992–94 revealed architectural components that considerably extend the history and development of the entire complex. In all, nineteen sondages of varying extent and ten clearing sondages were undertaken. A clearing sondage (Fig. 17,b) in the courtyard (XIV) yielded three gold solidi of the emperor Honorius (395–423). In the baptistery (VII), a small sondage (c) revealed a shallow fill containing pottery dating to the fourth-sixth centuries and a section of Punic mud brick.⁶ A smaller sondage (d) in the northeast aisle (XI) of the chapel showed a shal-

⁴P. Gauckler, *Basiliques chrétiennes de Tunisie, 1892–1904* (Paris, 1913), 11–19.

⁵N. Duval, "Études d'architecture chrétienne nord-africaine, I, Les monuments chrétiens de Carthage," *Mélanges de L'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 84 (1972), 1081–92.

⁶We thank Professor Friedrich Rakob for this identification.

low fill containing pottery of the same broad dating as those in the baptistery, but also a fragment of LRSW2 datable to the sixth century. In both sondages there was no evidence of earlier floors. Two sondages (e and f) were made in the east rooms (XVIII and XIX), where sections of mosaics had been lifted before our campaigns started. While not strictly speaking in sealed desposits, the pottery recovered is useful as it dates to the same broad period as that found in the baptistery and chapel.

In the basilica itself, several sondages were made to provide information on the mosaics, architecture, and liturgical arrangements. Two sondages under the foundations of the coffer mosaic, immediately in front of the northwest wall on axis with the church (Fig. 17,g,h), unearthed a massive sandstone block and eleven fragments of a statue of a woman in the guise of Venus. A sondage in the first and second bays of the nave (i) uncovered, about 15 cm below the existing mosaic, a portion of a polychrome mosaic pavement decorated with a latchkey meander of swastikas (*pannetons de clé*) determining squares filled with rosettes and parts of an acanthus rinceau border (Fig. 19). The mosaic continued into the first intercolumniation of the inner southwest aisle. Traces or solid tracts of its nucleus were also found in the third bay of the nave and subsequently in the aisles. A trench running southeasterly through the apse (II) revealed that originally its level may have been the same as that of the newly found mosaic. Immediately in front of the apse are two limestone bases for railing posts.

Another sondage was made in the center of the nave (Fig. 17,j), where we observed two sections of a jeweled border inserted into the coffer mosaic (Fig. 20). The area was marked off at the corners by square bases for posts (one now displaced). Here we uncovered a grey mortar surface (2.20×2 m) and, in the middle, a plaster-lined circular receptacle (0.45 m in diameter and 0.45 m deep), presumably for a reliquary casket (Fig. 20). Further clearing located the original position for the displaced base and traces of the same grey nucleus as that under the mosaic recently discovered in front of the southeast apse. The receptacle, then, and its mortar surround were related to the earlier mosaic. They marked the

place of the altar that apparently continued in use when the coffer mosaic was laid and the area later embellished by the jeweled border.

A third strategic sondage was made in the eighth bay of the nave (Fig. 17,k). It revealed, below the coffer mosaic, part of a dismantled apse (Fig. 21) founded on a heavy mortar and rubble bed and set on two contiguous rows of sandstone blocks averaging $1 \times 1 \times 1.30$ m. Pebble wedges between them create the curve of the apse. The walls would have extended to the seventh double columns of the nave colonnades, defining a diameter comparable to that of the southeast apse (7.33 m). A sondage at the foot of the double columns on the southwest side (l) disclosed a fill containing two Corinthian capitals, one unfinished.

Much more study is required before we can presume to establish a chronology for the entire complex of Dermech I. The elements found so far do, however, permit us to propose at least two building periods. In the first period, the picture that seems to be emerging is of an early basilica, with altar area and reliquary receptacle in the fifth bay (Fig. 17,j) and an apse to the northwest. This basilica was paved, at least at the southeast end, with a geometric and floral mosaic (i). A date ranging from the mid-fourth through the fifth century is suggested by the sherds; a more secure *terminus post quem* should emerge after all finds have been studied.

In the second period, the northwest apse (Fig. 17,k) was dismantled to its foundations; the basilica was reoriented to the southeast, and the body of the church was repaved with the surviving coffer mosaic; the earlier altar area (j) was retained. The remodeling of the basilica was undoubtedly the beginning of a vast building campaign that continued with the baptistery, chapel, and side rooms. Its date can be placed provisionally in the sixth century based on preliminary study of the ceramic finds. Coins and glass will further refine the chronology.

In a later phase of the basilica, the original altar area (Fig. 17,j) was abandoned and the reliquary filled with stones. An altar platform was erected over the coffer mosaic in the third and fourth bays (m), and a lengthy solea was created extending from the southeast apse to the eighth bay of the nave (n). Its mosaic pav-

ing of polychrome interlacing circles was laid directly on the coffer mosaic (see Fig. 18). The coffer mosaic itself underwent multiple repairs at different dates, the most recent marked by the substitution of red ceramic for red limestone tesserae. Careful study of these repairs in relationship to the solea and to mosaics in the

annexes should shed new light on the liturgical arrangements in the basilica as well as on the chronological sequence of the mosaics as a whole.

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